What do Second-Language Learners Know about their Language Learning? 
A Second Look at Retrospective Accounts

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1. INTRODUCTION
Since the early 1970s, researchers and teachers in the field of second-language learning have been interested in the cognitive abilities that language learners bring to the task of acquiring another language. This interest has been reflected in theoretical models which include learner strategies as one of the factors to be taken into account in an explanation of how second languages are learned and acquired (e.g. Bialystok 1978; Schumann 1978). It has also led to research on learner strategies, and data, generated to a great extent from learners' verbal reports, have documented strategies that learners utilize to learn and use their second language (Carton 1966, 1971; Rubin 1975, 1981; Naiman et al. 1975; Hosenfeld 1977; Bialystok and Frohlich 1977; Blum-Kulka and Levenston 1978; Wesche 1979; Varadi 1980; Cohen and Aphek, 1980, 1981; Bialystok 1983; Haastrup and Philipson 1983; Chamot 1984). Useful distinctions have been pointed out regarding the functions of the strategies, and tentative systems for classifying them have been proposed (cf. Tarone 1981; Rubin 1981, 1984; Faerch and Kasper 1984). Moreover, while providing researchers and teachers with lists and classifications of strategies that learners reported using, the research has also served to illustrate what learners know about their learning process—i.e. what they can bring to awareness and articulate during an interview, be it based completely on actual fact or largely inferred. Literature in cognitive development (e.g. Flavell 1979; Wong 1982; Hagen et al. 1982; Brown et al. 1982; Brown and Palinscar 1982) refers to this kind of 'relatively stable, storable ... information that human thinkers have about their own cognitive processes and those of others' (Brown et al. 1982: 87) as one dimension of metacognition.

To date, data collection and analysis in this area are focused, primarily, on strategies. There have been no investigations that have examined verbal reports to determine learners' knowledge about other dimensions of their language-learning experience. Let us consider, for example, the information that the following verbal report of a young Spanish economist could provide if one did so:

In the summer of 1978, I decided to go to Berkeley. The class was a disaster. It was not organized by the university. There were only Spanish students; they did not divide the students according to their levels and the teachers had little method. After one month, I enrolled as an auditor in a university course and attended two seminars ... The summer in California was very satisfying. My English was much better than it was in England. I understood more and I talked more easily. I had made progress, but I couldn't measure

it. It was all unconscious. But I was always trying to get information in a conscious way. I read the ads, listened to radio commercials and watched TV.

In the above retrospective account the learner reports on some of the social strategies he may utilize, i.e. those activities in which he participated to provide himself with opportunities to learn and use English (e.g. the ESL class, the university course, reading ads, listening to the radio, and watching TV). A second look at the statement indicates that he is capable of talking about other dimensions of his language learning as well. He tells us how he has evaluated the outcome of his social strategies ("The class was a disaster; the summer in California was satisfying"), and the criteria he used to justify his evaluation of the ESL class ("... There were only Spanish students; they did not divide the students according to their levels and the teachers had little method ..."). This self-report offers further evidence of the learner's knowledge of his proficiency in English ("I understood more and I talked more easily"), and of a belief he held about how a second language is learned ("... I had made progress, but I couldn't measure it. It was all unconscious ...").

The purpose of the study reported on in this paper was to further investigate and classify learners' statable knowledge about their language learning. Answers were sought to the following questions:

1: What aspects of their language learning are learners capable of talking about, other than their strategies?
2: What insights can this knowledge provide us with on their use of strategies?
3: What is the significance of this knowledge?

2. PROCEDURES

A group of twenty-five adults who had lived in the United States for no longer than two years and who were enrolled part-time (five hours a week) in the advanced-level classes of the American Language Program at Columbia University were selected and interviewed (Appendix 1). The questions that formed the main body of the semi-structured interview required participants to report on recurring events in their language-learning history. In order to facilitate retrospection and to reduce the possibility of faulty reporting due to memory lapses, the following procedures were implemented before the actual interview.

First, a few days before the interview, participants were given a list of questions outlining the general areas that would be covered during the interview and asked to complete a grid of daily activities. The grid indicated the social settings in which participants usually found themselves during a typical week, and the language they used in each one. Reports were focused on the settings in which English was used, e.g. a favorite TV program, reading novels, taking a pottery class, studying for the TOEFL test, taking flying lessons.

Secondly, to help interviewees feel at ease and to give them confidence in their ability to talk about their learning, actual discussion of the social settings on their grid was preceded by questions about topics that language learners generally talk about quite readily (e.g. why they came to the United States; their reactions to the culture; their previous second-language learning experience).

Finally, before reporting on what they became aware of in a specific setting,
interviewees were asked to re-create/describe it. Then, questions dealing with the following topics were asked about each one:

1. why they participated in the given social setting
2. what strategies they used to express themselves, to understand what was said, and to think in their second language
3. what they noticed about the language
4. how they dealt with their errors
5. how they felt in that situation, and why
6. whether they felt that the situation contributed to their language learning, and why.

When the social settings listed on a grid had been discussed, more general questions were asked to test the reliability of the answers. These questions dealt with the same aspects of learning discussed in the main body of the interview, but they were not context-bound and, in some cases, presented learners with hypothetical situations.

The interviews, which averaged ninety minutes in length, were tape-recorded and transcribed. A content analysis of each one was completed, using a procedure adapted from the grounded theory of Glaser and Strauss (1969, 1978). (Wenden 1982 provides a more detailed description of the coding procedures.)

The initial analysis (Phase 1) revealed that, other than their strategies, interviewees were capable of considering retrospectively the following five dimensions of their language learning: (1) the language; (2) their proficiency in the language; (3) the outcome of their learning endeavors; (4) their role in the language-learning process; (5) how best to approach the task of language learning. Statements about these aspects of their learning were categorized respectively as designating, diagnosing, evaluating, self-analysing, and theorizing, to suggest the kind of assessment or judgement implied by each. In a subsequent analysis (Phase 2) these statements were analysed to determine what insights they might provide on learners' use of strategies. This paper will report on both phases. First, each category of statement will be explained. Then, selected examples of each type will be examined to illustrate what they suggest about the use of strategies. The concluding discussion will consider the significance of the analysis by referring to the literature on metacognition, and suggestions will be made for future research.

3. FINDINGS: A PRELIMINARY CLASSIFICATION

3.1 Designating
This category refers to statements made about the language. Interviewees referred to grammar (e.g. specific structures, word order), to phonology (e.g. dialectal differences, accent), and most often to vocabulary (e.g. cognates, level, and range). They also made observations about the rules of discourse and the function of language. (Appendix 2 lists the twenty-two different aspects of language they referred to.)

Interviewees' statements about language varied in complexity. Some simply indicated whether words, sounds, and grammar structures were familiar or
unfamiliar. Others were able to classify words they noted as common, technical, key words, or described different kinds of pronunciation in terms of dialectal differences. Yet others referred to relationships between vocabulary, social setting, and communicative task, noting how certain tasks or settings required a wider range of vocabulary or a more formal choice of words. An Israeli civil servant, for example, felt that his job did not provide him with the opportunity to enlarge his vocabulary because, as he said, 'Part of my work is negotiation . . . Most negotiations are pure business, so the vocabulary is very narrow . . . we talk about the same subjects . . .'. Some, although very few, referred to culturally derived semantic differences. Thus, a Japanese businessman, explaining the reason for his difficulty with vocabulary stated, 'I know what I mean when I say department store in Japan, but I don’t know if it means the same thing in America. Words don’t have the same meaning in different cultures . . .'.

3.2 Diagnosing
Interviewees’ statements were classified as diagnosing when they referred to their proficiency in the language. Sometimes these statements focused on what they knew or did not know ('we had learned British pronunciation . . .'; ' . . . my knowledge was formal and passive. There were many colloquial expressions I did not know'). Or, they referred to the quality of their performance (' . . . when I talk, I always have the feeling that I’m making a mistake'; ' . . . during that time, it was very hard to understand what people said').

These reports varied in specificity—participants made general statements about what they could or could not do in various skill areas ('I couldn’t understand'); they sometimes referred to how difficult or easy it was ('I understood with difficulty'); they pinpointed an area of specific difficulty ('I understood 50 per cent of the key words'); or compared themselves to someone else ('Europeans understand more easily than Japanese'). They also commented on their progress ('I’ve made some progress. I have no problem understanding and talking to people in ordinary situations').

3.3 Evaluating
Interviewees’ evaluative statements focused on the outcome of using a strategy. They indicated whether they had learned or if the strategy had been useful, good, etc. The following three examples are illustrative. In the first, Cida describes the usefulness of her strategy for learning words.

... I take notes in the margin; I write the synonyms of new words in English and Portuguese on small cards. I still use the system today. It’s very useful.

Here, Ryuichi evaluates as inefficient a production strategy he had been using:

I first make a sentence in my mind in Japanese; then, I transfer it to English. It’s not good. From the first I must [should have thought] think in English.

In this last example, Laszlo acknowledges the limited use of talking to himself as a means of becoming more fluent:

I often speak to myself . . . It’s easier to practice . . . although I think it’s not a good way. I’m getting used to not speaking.
Interviewees assessed positively the outcome of most of the strategies they utilized. Only in a few cases were they evaluated as not contributing to learning and in even fewer cases yet (about two) were they uncertain of the outcome.

3.4 Self-analysing

These statements referred to participants' reactions to a particular learning activity, i.e. the feelings it evoked ('I took a course in listening. It was awful... Later I took a reading course... that class was frustrating...'). Statements were also categorized as self-analysing when interviewees expressed views they held of themselves as facilitating or hindering their language learning. These views referred to their language aptitude ('I don't have the ability to learn'), learning style ('I have to see it written to remember'), personality ('I want to conquer English—I'm ambitious'), and age ('At my age it's hard to remember'). A third type of statement categorized as self-analysing referred to social role and its relationship to language learning. Sometimes, for example, it was a source of motivation ('My husband is studying; I should too'); in other instances, it was an impediment to learning, as in the case of a Yugoslavian businessman who confessed that adjusting to the circumstances of his job prevented him from studying English.

3.5 Theorizing

Interviewees' statements were described as theorizing when they referred to their beliefs about how best to learn a language. Some of these beliefs were explicitly stated, while others were implicit. Explicit beliefs usually referred to one of the following general principles of language learning:

a. **Use the language**, e.g. 'I told you I'm learning the natural way'; 'I had to practice—that's the secret.'

b. **Learn about the language**, e.g. 'Learning grammar is fundamental... vocabulary is also important'; 'It's a good way to learn from your mistakes...'.

c. **Personal factors are important**, e.g. '...I think the most important thing is our personal ability to learn English...'; 'I think one problem for me and perhaps everyone learning a language, you have to be stimulated to learn.'

Implicit beliefs were revealed when learners explained why they had found a particular learning context or activity, i.e. a social strategy, to be effective. In their evaluations, learners referred to ten aspects of a learning context. They will be explained in terms of questions implied by the statements that participants made about each one.

- **Content**: was what was being learned new? relevant to their needs?
- **Method**: did the method encourage cognitive involvement?
- **Focus on accuracy**: were mistakes corrected?
- **Teacher**: was he/she encouraging? supportive? competent? available?
- **Social environment**: were fellow learners friendly? did they have the same goals? how large was the learning group?
- **Opportunity for use**: was an opportunity provided to use the language?
- **Clarity**: what means were available to facilitate understanding (e.g. variety of media used, repetition, previous knowledge)
- Task: were tasks varied? were communication tasks elementary? challenging? boring? interesting? too complex?
- Linguistic environment: was the language authentic? good English?

Of course participants' views on these varied aspects of a learning environment were not always similar. For example, some considered the opportunity to be corrected necessary, while others found it an impediment to learning. There were also varying views on how complex a learning or communication task should be, or on whether the language they heard was authentic or what they referred to as 'good English'. (See Appendix 3 for a summary overview of the five categories, and Appendix 4 for an excerpt from a coded transcript.)

4. USE OF STRATEGIES

Interviewees' statements about the varied dimensions of their language learning classified in the preceding section were also examined to determine what insights they might provide into the use of strategies. The results of this analysis have led to the following tentative suggestions. (For purposes of clarity, strategies referred to in the following examples are italicized.)

4.1 Interviewees reported engaging in strategies when noting an unfamiliar item of language.

When interviewees' statements about language referred to new or unfamiliar items, they also, usually, reported engaging in strategies to understand and/or retain what they said they had noted. Ryuichi, for example, reported noting 'strange' vocabulary while reading the *New York Times*, and when this happened, he said he 'first... read each word and looked it up'. Yoko said she attended to new sentence patterns during her sociology lectures and reported what happened when she did so:

I think this is a very good pattern. I must use it in the future. *And I try to use it in my next composition.*

She also reported how becoming aware of sound differences while talking to friends led her to engage in two strategies. She says:

I heard consume (consOOm) not consume (consIUm). It was a new finding. I thought this is strange, so I checked on the pronunciation in my dictionary, and now I am careful to listen for this sound in conversation.

In talking about how she noted colloquial expressions specific to certain social settings during her first months in the United States, Eunn Jinn also described the strategies she used to make the words her own:

When I hear these words, I feel they are strange. *I ask what they mean. Then I try to use them.* At first it seems strange. After using one, two to three times, it becomes my word.

4.2 When experiencing a gap between communication need and linguistic repertoire, learners were also prompted to use strategies.

When statements about language proficiency referred to difficulties that participants had in using the language to communicate, they also described strategies used to cope with their difficulty. For example, having referred to his problem in
listening comprehension when he tried to speak with others, Miguel described the strategy he used to cope with the problem:

My problem was understanding . . . I asked questions and listened with my five senses.

Later he spoke of a different area of difficulty and of the strategy he used to deal with it:

My problem is to use the words. [HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH IT?] Talk, talk as long as there is conversation. Your partner speaks to you and you can use more specific words.

Liliane knew that her pronunciation was poor and that she had difficulty remembering formulaic expressions necessary to order in a cafeteria. In these instances, she reported telling the attendant at the cafeteria to try to understand her as she repeated it. She said:

The problem on the street and in the cafeteria is one must talk fast . . . use 4 or 5 expressions. I can't remember them. My pronunciation is bad. People have no time to understand me. So I tell the attendant at the cafeteria, 'You have to understand me. Let me say it a second time.'

Later, reflecting on how she dealt with mistakes she said she made regularly, she reported that she chose to avoid those she had identified as problem structures by using less difficult structures.

4.3 Inhibiting feelings, such as fear, embarrassment, and uncertainty were also a stimulus to strategy use.

According to the reports, participants' knowledge of their specific linguistic problems sometimes provoked inhibiting feelings such as fear, embarrassment, and uncertainty. In a few of these cases, descriptions of these feelings also included references to the strategies they used to deal with the linguistic problem and, it may be inferred, the emotional discomfort it aroused. For example, interviewees who reported being nervous or afraid when they had to speak stated, 'First, I construct the sentence in my language and then I translate.' Others, such as Miguel, who were worried about how to use certain structures, said, 'I notice how the landlord uses it (i.e. how it is used), relate that to what I have learned and then begin to use it.' Because Dean did not like to see his in-class compositions sprinkled with teacher's corrections, he took care to underline words that he was unsure of and to look them up in his dictionary, or to limit himself to expressing his ideas with simple words.

4.4 The following criteria were used to justify interviewees' evaluation of a strategy as effective or ineffective:

a. Improved proficiency in the language. Quite often, interviewees justified their evaluation of a strategy as useful by referring to how it had raised, or could help raise, the level of their proficiency in the language. Laszlo, for example, said he found discussing social problems useful, for, he added, 'although I have a very broad passive knowledge of vocabulary on the level of understanding and recognition, I cannot express my thought to speak accurately'. The implication is that by discussing social problems, he would improve his oral proficiency.
Dean reported that keeping and trying to memorize lists of words was his main strategy for maintaining and improving his level of language proficiency. When asked why he found it useful he said, 'when I meet the word on TV or movies, I recognize it' and that, in a general way, it helped him to express himself better, though this did not mean that he could 'use the word in conversation'.

While Tao is less specific, he, too, states, 'Times (i.e. reading the Times magazine) is good... I improve my reading and vocabulary.'

In other words, learners evaluated a strategy as effective when (1) it provided practice in a skill in which they felt themselves to be deficient, and (2) it broadened their knowledge of one or other of the linguistic codes.

b. **Role in the language-learning process.** Less often, the interviewees referred to personal factors as criteria for judging a strategy as effective. Fulvia referred to her style of learning to indicate why asking her husband to explain things to her was not an effective learning strategy:

> But my problem is if I don't see the word written, don't see the spelling, I just can't learn, can't catch (the meaning)... I can't remember if it's not written.

-Monica told why the idea of keeping a notebook of new words was not a good strategy for her: 'I don't think I should do this because it's not good. I think it's good but you need patience to do that.' And when questioned further, she admitted she did not have the patience.

c. **Beliefs about how best to learn a language.** Interviewees' beliefs about how best to approach the task of language learning were also used to evaluate the effectiveness of a strategy. In the following example, when Miguel states that he is learning English 'naturally', he is referring explicitly to his beliefs about how best to learn a language as criteria for judging his classes in Micro Economics and Accounting as a useful means of learning/improving his English. He said,

> I read, study, take notes in English. I listen to lectures. It's useful to practice English. I don't think of the language. I think of the subject. I told you I'm trying to learn English naturally. These are very useful hours.

Laszlo is also explicit about his reasons for asking his friends to correct him when he talks. He says:

> ... when I talk, I always have the feeling that I'm making a mistake. So I ask my friends to correct me. It is a good way to learn—from your mistakes. After they explain, I try to remember ...

While learners' explicit beliefs were used to justify their evaluation of all three types of strategies discussed in their reports, i.e. learning, communication, and social, their implicit beliefs were referred to exclusively to justify their social strategies, i.e. activities they engaged in to provide themselves with opportunities to learn and use the language. In the following example, Cida points implicitly to the social environment as her reason for determining that participating in a discussion group was useful.

The class was supportive. They told me I was improving. That was good for me.

Oshi refers to the method of teaching to explain why he found his language classes in the United States effective:
... teachers don't teach strictly the rules of English ... they try to get the English from the students, but in Japan, we had to memorize ... that's not creative.

Liliane refers to the complexity of the communication task as a criterion for evaluating as useful her conversations with American friends:

... they ask me about complex matters ... they don't talk about the 'pen' as in the first English lesson ... 

4.5 Language-learning priorities determined strategy use.

Analysis of the reports also suggested how participants' knowledge of their proficiency in the language and their beliefs about how best to learn it led them to concentrate their strategies on a particular language skill or aspect of the linguistic code. Cida, for example, realized that she had special difficulty with pronunciation. She reported: 'My landlady would repeat the words I could not pronounce. My problem was pronunciation.' When asked what she paid attention to while auditing social-work seminars, she reiterated, 'My problem is pronunciation. I paid attention to how they said the word.' Later she described the strategies she used to deal with her problem:

(A) pronunciation problem is different from a vocabulary problem. I listen and try to remember. Sometimes I know it but say the wrong word cause I'm still not sure. Now I ask my friends to correct me. I compare my error with their correction.

When asked to reflect on her progress, she stated:

Now I am more conscious of what I do wrong than at the beginning. Now I know more English. I know that my problem is stress and sound. Before, I knew something was wrong [with her pronunciation] but I didn't know what it was.

And later she said, 'I still have pronunciation problems, but my friend told me that she could understand what I was saying.' In assessing the value of her formal language program, she again referred to her pronunciation, 'The lab was good for pronunciation.' In fact, pronunciation was referred to in most of the social settings discussed with Cida. She engaged in strategies to overcome her difficulty in a variety of contexts for an extended period of time (e.g., talking to her landlady, a social-work colleague, her classmates, auditing social-work classes, formal English classes). She also monitored her progress carefully. In other words, it can be tentatively inferred that knowledge of her pronunciation problem led her to give priority to learning and using this aspect of language and thus determined the allocation of her strategic resources.

In other cases, priorities appeared to be determined by interviewees' explicit beliefs about how to learn a language. Eunn Jinn, for example, believed that it was important to learn grammar and vocabulary first. The influence of this belief was made clear throughout the interview—grammar and vocabulary played a focal role in her account of the strategies she utilized. While in Korea, she read stories in her grammar books, referred to her dictionary and other grammar books when she did not understand, and kept a file of vocabulary cards. She tried to find opportunities to speak—to use the new words so that she could remember them. When she came to the United States, her beliefs about what was fundamental to language learning did not change, and so her priorities remained the same. She took the TOEFL test because this would force her to
study grammar and vocabulary and develop strategies that would allow her to take advantage of her social environment to expand her knowledge of vocabulary and/or grammar. She took a writing course, which she found useful because of the grammar she learned. Of course, her endeavors were not exclusively focused on grammar and vocabulary, but concern for mastering these two aspects of the language did predominate in her account of her language-learning experience and was, therefore, often the focus of the strategies she reported using.

Almost all of the interviewees indicated that they had given priority to either one of the aural/oral skills or some aspect of the linguistic system at some stage in their language learning.

4.6 Strategies judged as ineffective can be changed. According to twelve of the interviewees, specific events in their language-learning history triggered a change in strategies they were using to learn and/or use the language. In other words, these events caused them to reflect on the outcome of their strategies and to reject them as ineffective. Ordinarily, the event was initiated by an unsuccessful attempt to use the language. In Eunn Jinn’s case, it was a reading course in which she tried to read a news magazine much beyond her level of proficiency. The following account illustrates what happened:

I took a course at the Institute. They used *Time* and *Newsweek* magazine. I found it difficult. It was a heavy book. I realized it was important to learn grammar and vocabulary first. It was the turning point... I decided to study grammar and vocabulary... That *Time* magazine class was frustrating; I could catch no meaning at all. It took me three hours to read one half page, so I realized I had to study grammar and vocabulary first. I quit the class and studied on my own.

Having come to the frustrating realization that she could not read this type of magazine, Eunn Jinn further realized that 'it was important to learn grammar and vocabulary first', and so she quit the class and studied on her own. In other words, knowledge about her proficiency derived from that experience led to the articulation of a belief about how best to approach language learning. This was translated into a decision to study grammar and vocabulary. Then, the decision was implemented. She quit the class and continued studying grammar and vocabulary on her own, rather than take classes that focused on developing facility in the language skills. (She had previously taken classes in listening and conversation.) The event recounted here had taken place in Korea, several years before the interview and, as indicated in the previous section, had continued to influence her approach to language learning from that time on.

Yoko’s circumstances were somewhat different. In order to participate in conversations with college friends, she had been trying to formulate a complete and accurate sentence in English in her mind before saying anything. She found, however, that this caused her to ‘hesitate and become nervous’. Moreover, she reported noticing that while she was thinking, the conversation moved on, so she didn’t speak, and the situation only became worse. At a certain point, things became so unpleasant that she decided:

...it’s not a good idea to think before speaking... even if you don’t know what to say or how to say it, once you begin to speak, you can say something. People ask you questions; you answer and the conversation continues. But if you hesitate and don’t...
speak and think of how you should say it in English, nothing happens. Now I'm trying not to be so serious because I can't enjoy the conversation. I'm nervous and slow to respond. I give a strange impression. This is very bad.

According to Eunn Jinn's account, her unsuccessful attempts to use the language resulted in a change of views about what was basic to language learning, and a subsequent change of social strategy. Implied in this change was the fact that her first strategy was considered inappropriate. In Yoko's case, her difficulties led to an explicit evaluation of the strategy that seemed to be the cause of her discomfort. However, unlike Eunn Jinn, Yoko did not indicate in her account that the evaluation had been generalized to the level of a belief, i.e. something she considered important for language learning in general. Having decided it was ineffective, she simply rejected it for another more efficient one.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Methodological caveats
A few methodological caveats are necessary to make clear what is not intended in the ensuing discussion of the significance of the analysis presented in this report. First of all, readers should be reminded that these findings are based on data provided by learners in a semi-structured interview. In such an interview, while every attempt is made to let the interviewee take the lead, with the interviewer probing for clarification and expansion of what is being said, the initial questions do direct learners to reflect upon particular areas of experience specified by the researcher. The topics or areas of experience suggested by the questions asked in this interview are reflected in three of the categories of statements—designating, evaluating, and self-analysing. In the case of self-analysing, however, only references to feelings were directly elicited by a question. Other references to personal factors were the outcome of probing questions and/or voluntarily reported by the interviewee as part of a reply to another question, as were statements categorized as diagnosing and theorizing.

It should also be emphasized that interviewees' statements reported in the context of an interview which leads them to look back on their language learning should not be equated with what they actually do or have done in specific instances. The alternatives that can be followed by participants when asked to report on their general procedures for completing a language task, outlined by Ericsson and Simon (1980), suggest why this is so.

These authors outline four possibilities. In some cases, subjects may actually know what procedures (or strategies) they use. They may use essentially the same ones in similar instances and be able to recall and report these directly (and accurately, it is implied) without referring to the particular instance in which they were used. In the case of participants in this study, for example, they may have remembered directly what always happened when they watched TV, i.e. what they paid attention to, what they found difficult, and the strategies they used to cope with their difficulties. And so, it would not have been necessary for them to re-create in their minds a situation when they watched TV to determine what to report.

A second possibility is that subjects remember what they have done in particular instances, and turn this information into a general procedure, i.e. what they do in all similar instances. In this study, interviewees may have remembered
what happened when they watched a particular type of program or what happened when they last watched TV, and generalized that information to what always happened (when watching TV). Yet another possibility is that only the task or situation is remembered (not the procedure) and, in reflecting upon it, subjects determine what would have been an appropriate procedure and then infer that this is what they must have done. Thus, the interviewees may only have remembered watching TV and decided what might have caused them difficulty in such a situation and what they would have done to deal with this difficulty and then they may infer that this is, in fact, what they have done or do. Finally, learners may simply report what general knowledge informs them about how such a task should be done. And so, the interviewees in this study may have referred to strategies their teachers had advised them to use, rather than those they had actually used or that they, themselves, would judge to be feasible in this instance.

Taking these alternatives into account, it would seem that retrospective statements can be a mixture of personal fact, inference based on personal fact, and popular belief, with a result that is not at all related to a particular learner's experience. Therefore, as a source of behavioral data, statements such as those analysed in this report should be interpreted cautiously. This does not necessarily diminish their value as a source of insight into interviewees' metacognitive knowledge, i.e. what they know and can report about their language learning. This will be discussed by referring to the literature on cognitive development referred to earlier.

5.2. Significance
In the literature on cognitive development, two dimensions of metacognition are generally recognized—knowledge about cognition and the regulation of cognition. Knowledge about cognition refers to the relatively stable and storable information that human thinkers have about their own cognitive processes and those of others. Regulation of cognition consists of those processes used to regulate and oversee learning, i.e. planning, monitoring, and checking outcomes.

In his discussion of metacognitive knowledge, the first dimension of metacognition, Flavell (1979) suggests three categories—person, task, and strategy—to distinguish what learners can know about learning. The 'person' category refers to beliefs that learners may have about themselves and others as learners and beliefs about the 'universals of cognition'. The 'task' variable includes knowledge that learners have (1) about the information or resources they may need to complete a learning task and (2) about the fact that some tasks are more difficult than others. Knowledge about 'strategies' means knowing what strategies are likely to be effective in achieving particular learning objectives in specific contexts or cognitive undertakings.

The classification of learner statements described in this study begins to make explicit what these general categories of metacognitive knowledge entail in the domain of language learning. The statements indicated that other than strategies, participants had knowledge of the following dimensions of their language learning:

- language (designating)
- language proficiency (diagnosing)
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- outcome of strategies (evaluating)
- personal factors (self-analysing)
- beliefs about how best to approach language learning (theorizing).

A rough comparison of these five categories with the three outlined by Flavell suggests that statements classified as diagnosing (references to language proficiency) and self-analysing (references to personal factors) exemplify what he has included under the person category; evaluations of the usefulness of specific strategies and statements about how best to learn a language point to the nature of the learners' strategic knowledge; and finally, learners' comments about language, indicating what they know about the topic of their learning and, consequently, about the focus of their tasks, points to a dimension of the task variable that appears to be assumed in Flavell's description.

By definition, knowledge of cognition cannot be a source of information on the actual operation of the regulatory processes, i.e. planning, monitoring, and checking outcomes. In other words, it does not tell us whether and how learners may use this knowledge during the actual process of learning. To gain insight into this second dimension of metacognition would require a method of data collection that could tap as closely as possible learners' 'on-line' answers, i.e. their 'monitoring of the here and now in a direct immediate fashion . . .' (Klatsky 1984: 86). However, the analysis of interviewees' statements about the five dimensions of language learning listed above did, at least, point to what might have prompted them to use strategies, persist in the use of certain ones or reject them as ineffective, i.e. it revealed the stated logic underlying the strategies used in the implementation of the planning and evaluative processes.

6. CONCLUSION
What do these preliminary findings suggest for researchers and classroom teachers? First of all, further research could refine, modify, and expand the categories provided here to describe what learners report knowing about their language-learning process. Secondly, attempts should be made to understand better whether and how this stated knowledge is reflected in practice. Here are some questions suggested by the analysis provided in this report:

1. Does learners' knowledge and understanding of language determine (a) the degree to which they utilize their social environment as a source of information on the language? (b) what they deem useful to attend to as they interact in their social environment? (c) the variety of strategies they develop to learn and use the language? And if so, how?

2. Does learners' knowledge of their linguistic strengths and weaknesses determine (a) what aspects of their performance they monitor and how specifically? (b) where they direct their strategies? and (c) which strategies they choose to use? And if so, how?

3. Does learner self-knowledge influence (a) the strategies they utilize to help themselves learn? (b) the goals they set for themselves? and (c) the expectations they have of achieving them? And if so, how?

4. Do learners' beliefs influence (a) their choice of and persistence in the use of strategies? (b) aspects of language they attend to and give priority to? (c) the
criteria they use to evaluate the effectiveness of their chosen strategies? And if so, how?

Research on learner strategies has been motivated, in part, by the desire to discover the secrets of successful language learners, with the hope of using the information to help less effective learners. This study suggests that our curricula in learner training, i.e. the activities we develop to nurture strategic competence, should not be limited to the transmittal of effective strategies. Teachers are also urged to discover what their students believe or know about their learning, and to provide activities that would allow students to examine these beliefs and their possible impact on how they approach learning. In sum, it is not enough that we strive to help language learners diversify their repertoire of strategies. A critical and informed awareness is necessary for the artful use of acquired skills.

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NOTES

1 I would like to thank Joan Rubin and Andrew Cohen for their encouraging comments and helpful feedback on the various revisions of this paper.

2 There is, of course, the research on grammatical judgements and metalinguistic awareness (Cohen and Robbins 1976, Schachter, Tyson and Difflay 1976, Arthur 1980, and Gass 1983). Generally, however, this research is not based on retrospective accounts and so does not provide insight into the concepts that learners use to talk about their language learning.

3 Rubin (1984) distinguishes strategies on the basis of purpose as learning strategies, communication strategies, and social strategies. She further subcategorizes learning strategies as cognitive and metacognitive. Cognitive strategies are defined as those steps or operations used in learning or problem solving that directly analyse, transform, or synthesize the learning materials, and metacognitive strategies as those related to the regulation or management of learning. Tarone (1981) has provided criteria for distinguishing a communication strategy: (1) the desire to communicate meaning, (2) knowledge of one's inadequate linguistic or sociolinguistic repertoire, (3) an attempt to find alternative means to convey meaning or a decision to avoid doing so. Rubin (1984) uses the term 'social strategy' to designate activities that learners engage in to be exposed to and to practice the language. Social strategies place learners in a context which may require the use of learning and communication strategies. The term 'strategy' as I use it in this paper refers to all three types—with the exclusion of one subtype of learning strategy, i.e. the metacognitive strategy.

4 Without proper controls, facts represented by data collected in a semi-structured interview may not always be accurate. Reasons cited by Borg (1963), Naiman, Frohlich, and Stern (1975), and Kahn and Connell (1964) may be classified as follows: (1) duration; (2) incompleteness of information gathered; (3) error in the wording of questions, in probing, in motivating the respondent, and in recording the answers; (4) inadequate or extended irrelevant responses; (5) perceptions, attitudes, expectations, and motives of the respondent and the interviewer. Borg, Kahn, and Connell also agree, however, that many of these problems may either be avoided or attenuated if the interviewer is proficient. The following measures were, therefore, taken to raise the proficiency of the researcher's interviewing skills: a pilot study undertaken to determine the feasibility of the project was also used as an apprenticeship in interviewing. Interviewees—all ESL teachers—were asked to give the interviewer feedback on her skills. References dealing with interviewing were studied, and suggestions made by these researchers were used to guide the analysis of the recorded interviews of the pilot study for problems that occurred and the manner they were dealt with, the wording of questions, and approaches to probing.

5 In fact, in many cases, it was not necessary to ask all of these questions, as the learner contributed the information spontaneously in answering another question or in response to the probing questions (e.g. What do you mean? Why? How? When?) that were used to raise awareness data that were not immediately retrievable from long-term memory.

6 In Wenden 1984, these explicit beliefs are presented in more detail.
In Wenden 1982 I have described how the interview procedure used in this study can be adapted for use during student conferences or for classroom conversation groups about language learning. In another article (Wenden 1986) I describe a series of modules that would lead learners to reflect on one subset of beliefs, i.e. those categorized as ‘theorizing’ in this report.

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Haastrup, K. and P. Philipson. 1983. ‘Achievement strategies in learner/native speaker


Rubin, J. 1975. 'What the good language learner can teach us.' TESOL Quarterly 9: 41–51.


Wong, B. Y. L. 1982. 'Metacognition and learning disabilities.' Topics in Learning and Learning Disabilities 2/1.
APPENDIX 1

Profile of learners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of origin</th>
<th>No. of learners</th>
<th>Country of origin</th>
<th>No. of learners</th>
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<tr>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Columbia</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yugoslavia</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Native language</th>
<th>No. of learners</th>
<th>Native language</th>
<th>No. of learners</th>
</tr>
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<td>Sinhalese</td>
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<td>Italian</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Macedonian</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hebrew</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Portuguese</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungarian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>No. of learners</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>No. of learners</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>No. of learners</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>1</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>37</td>
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<td>28</td>
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<td>24</td>
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<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of linguistic competence</th>
<th>Level of education</th>
<th>No. of learners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advanced I</td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced II</td>
<td>BA degree</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced III</td>
<td>MA degree</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshmen English</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Length of stay in English-speaking country

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length of stay</th>
<th>No. of learners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6 months or less</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 months-1 year</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 year-1½ years</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1½ years-2 years</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

APPENDIX 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements about language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grammar</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>parts of speech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>specific features</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>new structures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>familiar structures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>word order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phonology</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rhythm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dialectal differences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>accent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>phoneme differences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sound-spelling correspondences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Semantics</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>semantic differences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>level of vocabulary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>range of vocabulary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cognates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>types of words, e.g. new, key, common</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Discourse rules</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>modes of explanation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>extent of explanation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>how topics change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>topics appropriate to setting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Function of language</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to broaden understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>instrumental</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## APPENDIX 3

### A preliminary classification of interviewees' statements: an overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement category</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Designating</strong> Language:</td>
<td>They use complicated structures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>grammar</td>
<td>I saw how words were related.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vocabulary</td>
<td>There are many different accents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pronunciation</td>
<td>In conversation topics change quickly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discourse</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Diagnosing</strong> Language proficiency:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>specifying</td>
<td>I understand 50 per cent of the key words.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>asserting</td>
<td>I couldn't understand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>qualifying</td>
<td>I understood with difficulty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>comparing 1</td>
<td>I understand better now.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>comparing 2</td>
<td>Europeans understand better than Japanese.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Evaluating</strong> Outcome of learning:</td>
<td>It was useful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>quality of experience</td>
<td>I learned. I learned a lot. I learned to write letters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>achievement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-analysing</strong> Self as learner:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feelings</td>
<td>I felt embarrassed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aptitude</td>
<td>I don't have the ability to learn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>physical state</td>
<td>If I'm tired, I can't learn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>age</td>
<td>At my age, it's hard to remember.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>style of learning</td>
<td>I have to see it written to remember.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>social role</td>
<td>My husband is studying. I should too.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>character</td>
<td>I want to conquer English. I'm ambitious.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theorizing</strong> How to approach language learning:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use the language.</td>
<td>I'm learning the natural way.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn about the language.</td>
<td>Grammar and vocabulary are basic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal factors are important.</td>
<td>You have to be stimulated to learn.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## APPENDIX 4

### Excerpt from a coded transcript

DES: designating-statements about language  
DIAG: diagnosing-statements about linguistic deficiencies/proficiency  
EVL: evaluating-statements about outcome of a learning activity/strategy  
SAL: self-analysing-statements about self as learner  
THZ: theorizing-statements about how to approach language learning  
THZ-M: implicit statements  
THZ-X: explicit statements  
Strategies are italicized.  
Statements about other aspects of learning appear in square brackets.

I took a course in listening. [It was awful. (SAL)] [I couldn't understand at all. (DIAG)]  
[Their pronunciation was too different. I had learned British pronunciation, and American pronunciation was different. (DES)] [I didn't learn. (EVL) If I had stayed longer I could have learned.]
Q: How did you learn on your own?
A: I read short stories in grammar book. [Learning grammar is fundamental. (THZ-X)]
I consulted the dictionary and grammar books to understand. [I've mastered several grammar books. (DIAG)]
When I didn't know what the sentence and grammar meant, I consulted someone. When reading, I first try to catch grammar structure. [If I can't get it exactly (DIAG)], [I feel uncomfortable. (SAL)]
I try to concentrate only on meaning is not to improve my English perfectly. (THZ-X)]

Q: What about the conversation course you took at the language institute?
A: [Helpful. (EVL)] [The teacher spoke English well. (THZ-M)]
I tried to use new vocabulary, but it's hard to say anything in English at first. (DIAG)
I was afraid to make mistakes. (SAL)] [I hesitated and murmured. (DIAG)]
Eventually I talked a little (DIAG), but it was not useful (EVL) [cause we talked about situations in coffee shops, hotels, parties and I didn't have chances to go there. (THZ-M)]
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